

Madame Chairperson and members of the committee, for the record my name is Vanessa Richards and I live in Broadus with my three children. I have been blessed with the opportunity to raise Traven, my special needs 14 year old, Tiarra, my 7 year old, and Teegan, my 6 year old.

We have been involved with DEAP services since Traven was a baby with the same Family Support Specialist I still have today. Traven was born with scoliosis. For the first 3 years of his life we made numerous trips to Spokane bracing and casting him. Nothing worked. We flew to Texas for an experimental surgery when Traven was 3 and just beginning to walk. In the last 11 years Traven has had almost 30 surgeries in Texas. He also has a seizure disorder, sleep apnea, is allergic to bees and is developmentally delayed. All of his basic self-help skills are provided by me including diapering. He attends school until noon everyday.

The DEAP program has provided intensive services to us over the years and one of the greatest assets is the Family Support Specialist. The relationship is similar to a doctor/patient relationship involving trust that can only be built over time. I value the information she provides, coordinating services, offering support and only being a phone call away. I can remember a time when I sat in one of my first educational meetings. I wanted to become a capable mother, I just didn't know how. I was overwhelmed with everything. I was given a compliment the next year at this same meeting on how I was asking the right questions and how I really seem to have embraced mothering a special needs child. I would have never been able to accomplish this without my Family Support Specialist. Because of my experiences with DEAP many mothers have asked more for advice and I have shared what I learned.

We have had many emergency situations with Traven and have also been thankful for the flexibility of the program. I know I can

make one phone call to my Family Support Specialist to help in situations like Traven's device coming apart and us having to fly back to Texas unexpectedly. We were just there in November and couldn't have the surgery so we had to come home. Traven is currently waiting a spinal fusion in Texas and I desperately need the flexibility to remain. I do not know what the future will bring for Traven. I do juggle everyday creating normalcy for my younger two and meeting Traven's needs at the same time.

I take pride in raising my children and I thank you for your past decisions which have truly affected my family in a positive way. Special needs children are so rewarding and Traven has truly been a bright spot in my life.